

Multi-annual plan for the stock of herring distributed to the west of Scotland and the fisheries exploiting that stock

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted a report drafted by Struan STEVENSON (EPP-ED, UK) and amended the proposal for a Council regulation establishing a multi-annual plan for the stock of herring distributed to the West of Scotland and the fisheries exploiting that stock.

The main amendments – adopted in the framework of the consultation procedure – are as follows:

- Members want to provide for a **strict recovery plan** based on advice from ICES and STECF in the event that the spawning stock should fall below 50 000 tonnes, **rather than the closure of the fishery**, as the Commission had proposed. They state that, when the spawning of biomass of the stock will be less than 50 000 tonnes in the year for which the TAC is to be fixed, the TAC shall be subject to a strict recovery plan based on advice from ICES and STECF. The Commission had provided that, under these circumstances, the TAC shall be set to 0 tonnes;

- there should be a maximum variation in TAC of 15% per year in any given year when the spawning stock is above 75 000 tonnes and within a maximum variation in TAC of **20% in any given year when the spawning stock is below 75 000 tonnes but above 50 000 tonnes**. The Commission had provided for a maximum variation in TAC of 15% per year when the spawning stock is above 75 000 tonnes. The committee felt that The TAC should not vary more than plus or minus 20% from the current TAC in any given year in order to maintain catch stability in the fishery. Considering the importance of the fishery and the uncertainty of the assessment, cuts should be made in a controlled and well managed manner, as well as taking socio-economic factors into consideration. This TAC constraint allows a gradual approach to cutting TACs should the spawning biomass of the stock fall only marginally below the 75 000 tonnes and prevents a drastic cut in TACs which would be set by two different mortality targets;

- a new clause provides that, in any year when ICES and STECF are unable to provide estimates of spawning stock size or fishing mortalities, the TAC should remain unchanged from the previous year. However, in the second and each subsequent year during which no scientific forecast is available, the TAC should be **reduced by 10%** compared with the previous year;

- the proposal provides that when the spawning biomass of the stock will be less than 75 000 tonnes but greater than 50 000 tonnes in the year for which the TAC is to be fixed, the TAC shall be set at a level which will result in a fishing mortality rate of 0,2 per year. The committee said that where this would result in a TAC level that exceeds the TAC for the preceding year by more than 20%, the Council shall adopt a **TAC level which is only 20% greater** than the TAC of that year;

- the committee agreed that vessels with the Single Area Licence should not be permitted to fish outside the area of the West of Scotland during the same fishing trip, but large pelagic vessels, such as those used for fishing herring in the area West of Scotland, are able to transmit information on catch statistics electronically and without the need to return to port. Ensuring that vessels transmit the relevant catch report to the Fisheries Monitoring Centre before they leave the area West of Scotland prevents the misreporting of catch statistics;

- revision of minimum fishing mortality rates and associated spawning stock biomass levels are essential elements of the plan and shall be adopted under the normal current legislative procedure, following **consultation of the European Parliament** ;

- the Commission shall consider a **second and independent recruitment index for West of Scotland herring stocks**. Where the advice indicates that the targets are not being met, the Council shall decide, in accordance with the consultation procedure, on either or both additional and alternative measures to ensure that the targets are met;

- lastly, for the purpose of Article 21(a)(i) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 on the European Fisheries Fund, measures for the implementation of Article 3(2)(c) of this Regulation shall be deemed to be a recovery plan within the meaning of Article 5 of Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002.